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ABSTRACT

This course outline designed for beginning theater students includes a statement of the premise and the assumption behind the course, the task to be accomplished, and the method to be used. The activities include a review of theater practice, a study of modern drama, and studio projects. (LL)

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'75 ATA Convention
Intro Course Panel

THE DRAMATIC ARTS TODAY

An Introduction to Theatre Study

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This outline represents and reflects a course given to beginning theatre students at Southern Methodist University by Professor Burnet M. Hobgood and Teaching Assistants Charles S. Ney and Charles Richter.

Premise: The class initiates its students into professionally oriented study of the contemporary theatre.

Assumption: Most of the 30-40 students are talented, largely committed, and fairly knowledgeable individuals who wish to enter theatre as a career, or who wish to consider that possibility. They come from different backgrounds and degrees of exposure to live theatre, in which they have been active participants.

The Task: To engage and inform and involve--in order to prepare for more effective assimilation and adaptation in future by those chosen to enter professional training.

Method:
A. A realistic review of the theatre profession and its practices today.
B. Study of major modern dramas and theatrical movements.
C. Selection and preparation of studio projects.

(Note: A companion course to "D.A.T.", in which most of the students are also enrolled, is entitled "Crafts of Theatre Production"; that course treats stagecraft, costuming, lighting, properties, and rudiments of scenic design. "D.A.T." therefore does not take up theatre technology.)

PROCESSES

A. Review of Theatre Practice

GUEST ARTISTS: Weekly visits by resident professionals and members of the department faculty. Discussion and demonstration of their viewpoints in relation to: Acting, Directing, Stage Managing, Playwriting, Research, Criticism, Administration.

AUDITIONS AND RESUMES: Each member of class either auditions or submits to an interview (as if for a non-acting job in an operating theatre). Classmembers evaluate each other. Preparation of resumes that can be used professionally.

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COMPARISON OF PUBLICATIONS: Reports and discussion of periodicals that provide information and viewpoints on current theatre. A stress on relative merits and editorial policy.

FACTS SHEETS: Presentation of summaries, prepared by classmembers, on the careers of important figures in modern theatre. These contain biographical data, identification of principal works or performances, brief critical commentary. (Each classmember receives a copy of each fact sheet for study.)

JOURNALS: Each classmember keeps a journal which the Teaching Assistant and/or Supervising Teacher reads and comments upon. The content of the journal is up to the student, except that it is to review rehearsal and performance experiences which he or she undergoes.

B. Study of Modern Drama

SCRIPT STUDY: The business of reading plays seen from the standpoint of the practitioner who will act in, direct, design, promote or money a production. The generalizations of criticism avoided in favor, at first, of developing an angle of view toward the dramatic action through concentration on a character, a scene, motif, aspects of environment or structure. Next, a broadened approach stresses the practitioner's need to "get inside the play" and personalize it. Finally, evocations of the play's texture and tone are created in original graphics, performed inventions, photographs--on a basis of free association.

PAPERS ON CHIEF MODERN DRAMAS: 500- to 1,000-word papers written on assigned works (Ibsen, Chekhov, Shaw, Strindberg, O'Neill) in first term. Portions of most successful papers read to the class as points of departure for discussion. In second term ten plays assigned for all to read and discuss, but the student chooses only three on which to write papers or to study by other means.

BACKGROUNDERS: Lectures, demonstrations, dialogues by members of the teaching team or major theatre trends, beginning with the precursors of realism. Usually backgrounders are accompanied by mimeo'd handouts that give the content in precise form (to insure accuracy in names, dates, places, definitions, etc.).

IN-DEPTH STUDIES: In second term the student chooses one of three plays on which to do as complete an examination as he or she knows how to present--1,000 to 5,000 words.

GROUP THINK TANK: Toward the end of each term, several meetings are scheduled for voluntary participation in which the teachers informally review the plays assigned and major issues raised.

C. Studio Projects

GROUP EXPERIMENTS: Exploration by some or all of the class into dramatic intentions and methods. Theatre games and active problem-solving. Distinctions and practical generalizations derived, discussed, and recorded for all to have.

WARMUPS: Before and after group experimentation, warmups that can be related to classroom focus enliven the process.

SCENEWORK: Short scenes from contemporary plays rehearsed and performed under the direction of a teaching assistant.

FEATURED PLAYS. In second term, portions of assigned dramas chosen, rehearsed and performed under the direction of classmembers. These presentations precede due dates of papers, etc. The T.A. directs a studio production of a work not assigned; desirably, this performance culminates the work of the second term.